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deborah copaken kogan

AUTHOR OF SHUTTERBABE

The Red Book

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voice

Hyperion / New York

[Praise for *The Red Book*](#)

“*The Big Chill* for the Facebook generation.”

—Adam Gopnik, author of *Paris to the Moon*

“Striking, funny, sad, and true-to-life, *The Red Book* sweeps us into the intersecting lives of characters who all started their adult lives in the same place, but upon whom time works both its magic and its entropy. Deborah Copaken Kogan is a deeply feeling writer, and this novel is a joy to read.”

—Dani Shapiro, author of *Devotions*

“I gobbled up *The Red Book* in two days, ignoring my work, my family, my life, so immersed was I in the lives of the people Deborah Copaken Kogan has so masterfully brought to life. Kogan’s eye is once wry and empathetic, and the book is a delight.”

—Ayelet Waldman, author of *Red Hook Road*

“*The Red Book*, which is filled with Deborah Copaken Kogan’s smart take on everything from friendship to sex to child raising to getting over the past—or not—makes for old-school compulsive reading.”

—Meg Wolitzer, author of *The Uncoupling*

For the ghosts of my past:

dead or alive,

out of touch or on speed dial,

you remain.

Epigraph

It's very difficult to keep the line between

You know what I mean? It's awfully difficult.

—Little Edie Beale,
Grey Gardens

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Author's Note

Every five years, after graduating from Harvard, its alumni are asked to account for the previous half-decade of their lives by filling out a form with basic biographical information (name, address, e-mail, job, spouse, kids) and composing a few descriptive summary paragraphs—three to five are suggested—for inclusion in a bound, crimson-colored anniversary report known, for lack of a better or actual title, as the red book. Many graduates write in, others do not, but whether one completes the assignment or not, at a minimum every name and address of the living are published, some prefaced only by “*Last Known Address*” for those classmates who’ve managed to elude the grasp of Harvard’s mainframe: a feat, considering how diligently the shepherds in the Alumni Affairs and Development office work to keep track of their flocks.

The deadline for these entries is the last quarter of the year prior to one’s reunion, so the class of 1989, who returned for their twentieth reunion in 2009, would have composed their red book entries in the fall of 2008. The books then land with a prereunion thud at the doorsteps of every graduate, whether they write in or not, whether they pay the suggested sixty-dollar donation to offset printing costs or not, whether they’re impatiently waiting for it or not.

No data exists concerning the percentage of red books that are cracked open the minute the recipients arrive home from work, the playground, an adulterous tryst, what have you, but the author will go out on a limb here and guess one hundred.



Harvard and Radcliffe

Class of 1989

Twentieth Anniversary Report

ADDISON CORNWALL HUNT. *Home Address:* 85–101 North 3rd Street, #4, Brooklyn, NY 11211 (718-427-0909). *Occupation:* Artist. *E-mail:* ahg@addisonhunt.com. *Spouse/Partner:* Gunner Griswold (B.A., Yale '88; M.F.A., University of Iowa '92). *Spouse/Partner Occupation:* Writer. *Children:* Charlotte Trilby, 1995; William Houghton, 1997; John Thatcher, 1998.

Okay, so here I am, just like back in college, writing this thing with only forty minutes left to go before the deadline. *Plus ça change.* (She pauses briefly, for inspiration, to hunt down the Fifteenth Anniversary Report, which is wedged between all the other red books and her freshman facebook—the very facebook, she’s been trying to explain to her offspring, which was the original model for their beloved virtual one, but they look at her as if she’s crazy, something she’s not so sure they’re incorrect to assume these days, except of course in this instance.)

So. Where were we? Right. My life these past five years. And can I just say that when I accepted Harvard’s invitation to join the class of '89, I don’t remember agreeing that every five years, *for the rest of my life*, I’d be forced to complete another writing assignment. There’s no reason I nearly failed freshman expos, people!

Just saying.

Ack! I got sucked into rereading the Fifteenth Report. You guys are fascinating. A tribute to your alma mater. I can’t even understand half of the things you’re doing, but I’m glad you’re out there doing it. Someone has to figure out the secrets of the universe, and better you than me, and I guess this is where I should probably take a moment to formally apologize to the TA I called Joe? John? Josh? in a panic at 3 A.M. before the Science A final, but the funny thing is, it’s been over two decades since that call, and I still don’t understand dark matter or quarks, though you did a valiant job trying to explain them. Okay, twenty minutes left. Come on, Addison, you can do this.

Okay, so, I guess the biggest change since my last entry is that I’ve finally entered the modern age: I have an actual Web site of my work (<http://www.addisonhunt.com>), I’ve hung out a shingle on etsy.com (http://www.etsy.com/shop/AddisonHunt?ref=seller_info), and I’ve been taking classes in QuarkXPress—finally! A quark I understand!—and PhotoShop to stay on top of the latest digital technologies. Still painting as always, but my process has evolved from a kind of neo abstract feminist expressionism into a photo realistic rendering of the mundane. That’s artists speak for “I used to throw paint on a canvas and use the palms of my hand to smear it here and there as a visual representation of unconscious female desires. Now I make intricate drawings with my hairbrush.”

Wish I could drone on longer, but there are Christmas cards to send out, and I have to help Houghton build the Parthenon for social studies by tomorrow, and Thatcher needs to be picked up from guitar, and Trilby’s boarding school applications are due in two days. As you might expect, I’m a little behind.

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Attorney, Legal Aid Society.

~~I wish I had something more interesting to report other than that, aside from a brief detour~~ the B-school midcareer, I've been with the same company, Lehman Brothers, since the week after graduation. I sometimes wonder what it would have been like to have jumped around a bit more but one of the reasons I've stayed with Lehman for so long is that I actually love both my workplace and my job. I find the challenges of managing both people and equity fascinating, and though I'm proud to be one of only a handful of female leaders in our company, it's still shocking to me that we're not better represented in positions of power on Wall Street.

I was named managing director of my group in July 2004. I lead a large and vibrant team focusing on mortgage-backed securities, our most profitable department in fiscal year '07.

On the love-life side of the equation, I finally found my soul mate, Danny McDougal, after allowing my former roommates to create a profile for me on Match.com. They called it a "intervention," which they staged during the annual July Fourth weekend we spent together at my house. Addison took the photo, Jane wrote the text, and Mia tried to use her Meisner technique to coax me out of what she called my "robotically corporate" communication skills. (Apparently asking a man on the third date whether he's willing to change an equal number of diapers as his wife is a Dating Don't; luckily Danny found both my honesty and the two-page, single-spaced document mapping out a future of equitably shared domestic responsibilities I presented to him on our ninth date slightly weird but charming enough to stay the course.)

Danny and I closed the deal, so to speak, six months later and found our dream house, an 1890s brownstone in Carnegie Hill, which we gutted and renovated over the course of the next year. I'd better understand the various stresses of renovating a property while simultaneously living in it, I might not have insisted we do it during our first year of marriage, but when you get hitched at the ripe old age of thirty-nine, there's no time, as they say, like the present.

Meanwhile no children yet, but they are definitely high up on our list of goals for FY09, and we hope, with any luck, to bring a couple of them to our twenty-fifth!

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As I sit here typing this, the newest member of the Zane Train—our tiny caboose, Zoe—has finally fallen asleep in her BabyBjörn, the only place she seems to want to engage in this kind of activity. Those of you familiar with the medieval torture device that is the Björn will understand what this means: I've had a baby glued to my middle-aged torso, without reprieve, every day since her birth. In fact, I think I must have been single-handedly responsible for the recent spike in Johnson & Johnson stock, as I've decimated the entire West Coast supply of Motrin to deal with the inevitable backache. Good practice, I suppose, for all the aches and pains we'll all be feeling soon enough. (Have twenty years actually gone by so fast? I walk around assuming I'm still twenty-two, then I catch a glimpse of myself in a store window or a bathroom mirror and am suddenly and brutally shocked back into reality. Who's that scary chick with the streaks of gray in her hair and the deep lines around her mouth? Oh, right. That's me.)

It's been, well, interesting, to say the least, to run around the country visiting colleges with my eldest while breast-feeding an infant. I've been so physically and mentally addled, in fact, that the other day Eli, my second, walked into the kitchen in search of a snack—oh my God, those boys can eat!—and I said, "Since when did you grow facial hair?" and he said, "Um, like a year

ago, Mom? Duh.”

—Okay, so here’s the part where I’m supposed to tell you about the total awesomeness of my career, followed by a rattling off of my awards and accolades, but the only award I have sitting framed on my mantel is a “#1 Mom” plaque my eldest, Max, made out of macaroni and clay for Mother’s Day circa 1996. Max was born soon after I got married, which was soon after I graduated, which was probably too soon, but there you have it. Max was followed closely by Eli, who was followed four years later by Josh, and though I was still going out on auditions from time to time, suddenly I had three young boys and little time, energy, or desire to keep banging my head against that wall. Plus, the kind of work I was able to land as an actress—a Tunney commercial here, a public service announcement there—never felt as fulfilling or stimulating as spending an afternoon on the floor with my children. I know that sounds like an excuse, and on some level I’m sure it is, but it’s also as true a statement as any: What I’d planned as a short maternity leave turned into seventeen years. And while they might not have been the most mentally challenging or professionally rewarding years of my life, spiritually they were rich and full. So rich and so full that when my husband asked me what I wanted for my fortieth birthday, I joked, “Another baby.” But then the more I thought about it, the less it felt like a joke. Hence Zoe Claire, now stirring in her baby carrier, rooting around for some lunch.

That’s not to say I spend every hour taking care of my kids, because until Zoe was born, there were many years when they were in school most of the day. I know I’m lucky to have been given the gift of time with them, so I try to pay it forward, in some way, every day. This past year and a half we’ve been particularly busy hosting fund-raising events at our home to help raise money for the Obama campaign. (G’Obama!) I’m also active in our local chapter of Planned Parenthood and in the soup kitchen committee at our synagogue, B’nai Israel. I’ve been running the Pinehurst School’s annual fund-raising auction ever since our son Max was in kindergarten, and I do outreach in Watts to help locate scholarship students who might not otherwise have heard of the school. Pinehurst has been a great learning environment for our three sons: small classes, one-on-one attention, a focus on the whole child. Zoe seems eager to get started as a student there as well—she often wails when her brothers leave in the morning—but for now, I’m hanging on to her lovely babyhood. Or, rather, her lovely babyhood seems to be hanging on to me. Constantly.

Jonathan, my husband, continues to direct romantic comedies. His latest, *Give and Take*, featuring Hugh Grant and Keira Knightley as former schoolmates caught on different sides of the law, should be hitting the theaters just before we head back for reunion, so definitely go see it if you get a chance!

Life, as they say, has been good to us, and my husband and I feel blessed and fortunate to be where we are. We have our health, four beautiful children, good friends, and a sturdy roof over our heads. A few years ago, we renovated an old stone house in the south of France, where we try to retreat every August, depending on Jonathan’s shooting schedule, so if you’re ever near Antibes during the summer, drop by! We’ll open up a bottle of local wine and watch the sun set over the Mediterranean. That’s a real invitation, so take me up on it. If you’re lucky, you’ll get to spend time with Jane as well, who always makes it down for at least a week with her daughter and her beau, Bruno. And if Jane ever makes an honest man of Bruno, we’ve promised to hold the wedding for them there as well. (Jane? Oh, Janie-pie? Hint hint.)

I look forward to catching up with everyone at reunion.

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Spouse/Partner Occupation: Editor, Libération. Children: Sophie Isabelle Duclos, 2002.

~~I am a card-carrying rationalist. I do not believe in God or higher powers or anyone up there manipulating our puppet strings, but every once in a while I do wonder why some of us are targeted, seemingly more than others, to endure loss. I'm not complaining. In fact I'm grateful for my life every day. It's just that when I sit down to read these entries every five years—actually, more like *devour* them in a single, all-night, sleepless gulp—what strikes me most profoundly about the nature of our disparate paths is not the infrequent “I lost my spouse” or “My father died last year,” but rather the fortuitous lack of life-altering tragedies in the majority of these entries.~~

I consider myself relatively happy, emotionally stable, and extremely lucky compared to many of the people I've met over my nearly two decades as a reporter, but examined closely, as this book forces those of us masochistic enough to send in these updates to do, my life reads more like a bad soap opera than like the life of a typical Ivy League grad, whatever *typical* means in this context.

As some of you know, I lost both of my parents and all three siblings to war before the age of seven. After making my way to Saigon, I was adopted by Harold Streeter, the army doctor who treated me upon my arrival in the city, and his wife, Claire. Then, a year after my new parents brought me home to their house in Belmont, Harold died of a freak staph infection he contracted at the hospital where he worked.

Then, thank goodness, there was a long lull, about which I've already written extensively on these pages, so I'll just summarize here to refresh our collective memory: After college, I moved to Paris, to work for the *International Herald Tribune* and to live out my Jean Seberg expatriate fantasies; this led to a freelance gig with the *Christian Science Monitor*, which got me out into the world beyond, where I began to specialize in covering global refugee crises. I met my husband Hervé on the back of a truck in Rwanda. I was asked to take over as the Paris bureau chief for the *Globe* a few years after that, until they shut down the bureau. They kept me on as a staff reporter, however, which basically means I work out of my home office when I'm in town, which suits both the *Globe* and me just fine, at least for now. I gave birth to our beautiful daughter Sophie, whom many of you met at the last reunion, in the summer of '02. Because of Hervé's humane French benefits, I never had to worry—as I often read in these pages that many of you do—about going bankrupt paying for Sophie's medical bills, schooling, or child care. (Although now that Obama just won the presidency, yesterday as I write this, I'm assuming the U.S. will finally get its act together on the health care front.)

I took predictable joy in these tragedy-free years, but as they began to accumulate, year by year, I started to get cocky, believing that the “curse” of bad luck that had plagued my earlier life was finally, thrillingly over.

Then, in late 2004, my husband's car was hijacked near Jalalabad, Afghanistan, where he was on assignment for the French newspaper *Libération*. Or at least that's what we think probably happened, as his body wasn't found until six days later, tossed into a ditch. For the next several months, our daughter, who was only two at the time, kept looking for him in all the places she remembered her father taking her: a restaurant in our neighborhood, the patisserie on the corner, the playground in the Place des Vosges. And then she stopped looking or even talking about him altogether. A year later, I fell in love and moved in with my current partner, the wonderful Bruno Saint-Pierre, who was Hervé's editor at *Libé* and the shoulder I often leaned on after Hervé's death.

Then, a few months ago, Claire, my adoptive mother, the most solid rock of my life, called to tell me she'd been diagnosed with Stage IV colon cancer. Her prognosis is not good. The doctor

won't give her an exact time frame, but they said she's probably looking at six months tops. She still lives in her (our) old house in Belmont, so I'll definitely be back and forth between Paris and Boston this fall and winter, but I'm also hoping she sticks around long enough to see the buds on her rosebush in May and the smile on her grandchild's face in June when Sophie and I arrive for the reunion.

Friday, June 5, 2009

Chapter 1

Addison

It had simply never occurred to Addison that the Cambridge Police Department not only kept two decade-old records of unpaid parking tickets, but that they could also use the existence of her overdue fines, on the eve of her twentieth college reunion, to arrest her in front of Gunner and the kids. If such a scenario had struck her as even remotely possible, she'd be thinking twice about zooming through that red light on Memorial Drive.

But it hadn't, so here we go.

"Oh my God, look at these idiots," she says, slamming her hand down hard on the horn of her black and white 1963 VW Microbus, which she purchased online one night in a fit of kitsch nostalgia. (That's the story she tells friends when they ask what she was thinking buying a vehicle that takes weeks or even months to fix when it breaks down, for want of parts. "Take my advice: don't ever go on eBay stoned," she'll say, whenever the conversation veers toward car ownership, online shopping, or adult pot use. "You'll end up with a first generation off the master Cornell '77 along with the friggin' bus the dude drove to the show.")

While the story is technically true, the impetus behind the purchase was much more about economic necessity, practicality, and appearances than Addison likes to admit. For one, she and Gunner couldn't afford a new Prius. They refused, on ecological principle, to buy a used SUV, or rather they refused to be put in the position of being judged for owning an SUV. (While they loved the earth as much as the next family, they weren't above, strictly speaking, adding a supersize vehicle to its surface for the sake of convenience.) A cheap compact, with three kids and a rescued black Lab, was out of the question. And they couldn't wrap their heads around the image of themselves at the helm of a minivan. To be a part of their close-knit circle of friends, all of whom have at least one toe dipped in the alternative art scene in Williamsburg, meant upholding a certain level of *épater-le-bourgeois* aesthetics. If a minivan or even a station wagon could have been done ironically, believe her, it would have.

Traffic in front of the Microbus has halted, an admixture of the normal clogged arteries at the Charles River crossings during rush hour compounded by the arterial plaque of reunion week attendees, those thousands of additional vehicles that appear every June like clockwork, loaded up with alumni families and faded memories, the latter triggered out of dormancy by the sight of the crimson cupola of Dunster House or the golden dome of Adams House or the Eliot House clock tower such that any one of the drivers blocking Addison's path to Harvard Square might be thinking, *Addison is right now (catching a glimpse of the nondescript window on the sixth floor of that disaster of a modernist building that is Mather House), There, right there: That's where I first fucked her.*

No, that wasn't a typo. Prior to marrying Gunner, Addison spent almost two years in a relationship with a woman. This, she likes to remind everyone, was before "Girls Gone Wild," before the acronym LUG ("lesbian until graduation") had even debuted in the *Times*, so she'd appreciate it if you wouldn't accuse her of following a trend, okay?

If anything, Addison has come to realize, thanks to a cut-rate Jungian who came highly recommended, Bennie was just one more way—like the roommates she wound up choosing—she's been trying to shake off her pedigree, to prove to herself and to others that she had more depth and facets than her staid history and prep school diploma would suggest. Addison may have been one of

the eighth generation of Hunts to matriculate from Harvard, but she would be the first not to heed the siren call of Wall Street. For one, she had no facility with numbers. For another, she'd seen what Wall Street had done to her father. He, too, had been enamored of the stroke of fresh Golden's on canvas from the moment he could hold a paintbrush, but he'd tossed his wooden box of acrylics into the back of the closet of his Park Avenue duplex—where it gathered dust until Addison happened upon it one day during a game of hide-and-seek—because that's what Hunts did: They subsumed themselves in their Brooks Brothers suits. The cirrhosis that killed him in his early fifties, when Addison was just a sophomore in college, was no act of God. It was an act, every glass-tinkling night, of desperation.

Bennie was the first person in her life to make that suggestion. Out loud, at least, and to Addison's face. And though both Bennie and her pronoun were aberrations in the arc of Addison's sexual history, what the two had together—although Addison would only be able to understand this in retrospect, perhaps the cut-rate Jungian—was love.

"Is Bennie coming this weekend?" Gunner asks. He's been hearing about this mythical creature Bennie Watanabe, ever since he and Addison bumped into each other that summer at a seaside tavern in Eressos, where Addison had gone with some vague and mostly unrealized notion of studying the poems of Sappho in their place and language of origin as inspiration for a series of abstract studies on the Isle of Lesbos she never ended up finishing, and Gunner had retreated to start what would become ten years later, his first and thus far only published novel, a coming-of-age tale that would feature, after his run-in with Addison, a girlfriend/muse from a socially prominent family who dabbles in bisexuality with a Japanese American lesbian before marrying her old boyfriend from prep school following their chance encounter at a taverna in the Lesbos city of Molyvos (because something had to be fictionalized, and it had a picturesque port he could describe, knowing boats as he did, in intimate Moby Dick-like detail).

The Walls of St. Paul's had been sufficiently well received—especially the boat parts, which the *New York Times* critic, an aquatic enthusiast himself, dubbed "Melvillean"—that Gunner was paralyzed by a decade-long writer's block. Though publicly he's always insisted that Tilly, his protagonist's self-delusional, bisexual wife, is nothing like Addison, privately Addison knows that the vaguely unflattering, unhinged portrayal of their early years together is a roman à clef in every sense of the phrase except for the inventively imagined scenes of three-way sex among the protagonist, his wife, and the random assortment of foreign women they picked up along the way during their first year of marriage, which was spent, as Addison and Gunner's had been, backpacking around the globe. For as much as Gunner had begged his new bride to bring another woman into their bed, Addison did not share this same fantasy, and, in fact, she resented her husband's preconceptions that such a scenario was possible. Bennie was an anomaly, she kept telling him. A momentary slip of the self.

"So what exactly is your regular self when it comes to sex?" Gunner recently asked, after Addison once again claimed exhaustion as an excuse against her husband's amorous onslaught.

"I'm just tired, okay? I deal with three kids and their endless pits of need all afternoon while you're off in Dumbo in your 'garret' writing the great American novel, and my paints go untouched. I'm sorry. I'm just not in the mood."

"You're *never* in the mood," said Gunner, sulking. "We need to talk about this, Ad. It's affecting my work."

Don't you fucking blame me, she thought. And while we're on the topic, what about *my* work? Bennie wanting to avoid conflict at such a late hour, she said only, "Yes, sure, okay," and kissed his forehead. "Let's talk about this when I'm more rested. I'm sorry, I really am. When you finish your novel and sell it, maybe we can use some of the money to go away, just the two of us."

"That'd be great," his voice said, though the rest of him seemed less convinced.

And another night of lovemaking was once again averted.

It's been a year—no, fourteen months—Addison figures, since they've had sex. All right, maybe fifteen or sixteen. She's kind of lost track. She understands this must be frustrating for her husband but she can't will herself to feel passion where none lingers. She tells herself it's all because of him—his lack of a successful follow-up, his moping around feeling sorry for himself, his sullen moodiness, his financial impotence. But at night, when she finds quiet moments alone for release, it's images of ripe breasts and swollen vulvas that send her over the edge.

"Oh, please, I'm as heterosexual as they come, and I have an entire encyclopedia of breasts and vulvas and jay-jays in my head," her friend Liesl recently told her when Addison wondered aloud, over a Red Bull and a Red Stripe, whether her pregame masturbatory fantasies were within the realm of heterosexually normal. "There's no such thing as 'normal' when it comes to sex. You of all people should know that."

"But do you fantasize about other stuff, too?" Addison wondered. "You know, besides the lady parts."

"You mean like the scene where I'm lying on the pool table at a frat house? Or where I'm Kate Winslet on the *Titanic*, being sketched by Leonardo DiCaprio?"

"See? I don't have any stuff like that," Addison lamented.

"Oh, please," Liesl said, laughing. "You're welcome to borrow mine."

But later that night, when she tried to conjure the pool table scene, the undergrad boys turned into undergrad girls. And on the *Titanic* she herself was being sketched by Kate Winslet.

"I have no idea if Bennie's coming," she now tells Gunner, "although she did just send me a friend request on Facebook."

"Really? What'd she say?"

"Nothing."

No matter how many times her kids have made fun of her for feeling insulted by friend requests made without even an intimation of a greeting—a "Hello there!" or "Long time no see!"—Addison is pretty sure she'll never get used to the idea that modern online social interaction completely eschews the laws of common courtesy, never mind dilutes, forever, the meaning of the word *friend*. Her fourteen-year-old daughter has 789 "friends." 789 friends! What can that even mean when Addison, with forty-two years of nonvirtual social interaction under her belt, has 139 "friends," all of whom she has sought her out like cancer cells in search of a new blood supply from the minute she created a log-in name and a password, half of whom she only vaguely remembers, if at all, from this or that era of her life?

Sure, anyone who showed up in college with a typewriter, as she did, then wound up purchasing one of those pathetically quick-to-crash first Macs, was just finding her sea legs in the world of online social networking, at first to monitor her still-technically-too-young-to-join-Facebook children's profiles, then because, once ensconced and entrapped, it felt mildly comforting to reconnect with those who'd disappeared from one's Filofax-era life. Even if reconnecting meant simply scrolling down an endless stream of mundanities—Joe Blow has the flu; Jane Doe is contemplating eating the last Girl Scout cookie—and wracking one's brain to come up with a comeback that was both restrainedly witty and seemingly effortlessly so. "Blow, Joe, Blow!" "Courage, Jane."

When Bennie's message-free friend request suddenly appeared on Addison's screen, attached to a profile photo containing Bennie, her children, and her partner, Katrina Zucherbrot—aka Zeus, the German-born artist whose ten-foot-tall sculpture of a phallic vagina had recently been added to the permanent collection at the Whitney—Addison felt slight tinges of nostalgia (for time past), jealousy (over Zeus's success), and curiosity (to check out Bennie's photos), but she was otherwise unmoved. On the other hand she'd read, with breath-accelerating, body-chemical-changing fascination, all about Bennie and Zeus and their Petri-dish progeny five years earlier, in the Fifteenth Anniversary Report wherein Bennie had described, in raw detail, how each partner had given birth to one child using sperm from the other's brother. And she'd been riveted by the recent Twentieth Anniversary red book

in which Bennie announced her intentions to retire from Google at the end of 2009 to begin the new phase of her life, in which she planned to start a foundation that would give scholarships to bullied gay teens and fight for the right of gay marriage.

Clicking through Bennie's photo albums on Facebook had been voyeuristically interesting, to be sure, but the act lacked both the context and enlightenment that Bennie's narratives were able to offer. Addison was struck only by the universality of the visual banality therein: Here's the happy family on vacation at the beach; and here they are opening presents on Christmas; and oh, look, here they all are standing in front of the Brandenburg Gate with Zeus's parents.

"That's bullshit!" Bennie had hurled at her, that frigid January of their senior year, just after final exams when Addison abruptly broke off the relationship. "You've never heard of a turkey baster?"

Addison had come to Bennie's spartan room in Mather House, dry eyed and rational, to explain that as much as she'd enjoyed the nearly two years they'd spent together as a couple, as much as she'd learned about herself and about her body's ability both to give and receive pleasure—skills she would treasure forever—she assured Bennie, touching her lover's forearm, treasure forever—she'd decided that she simply couldn't wrap her head around the concept of spending the rest of her life with a woman. "I mean, experimenting in college is one thing, but I want to have kids one day," she said. "A normal family."

Hence Bennie's initial comment about the turkey baster, followed by more colorful castigation after Addison admitted to having joined the mile-high club with her male seatmate on the Delta shuttle home from break. "You bitch!" Bennie wailed. "You fucking two-faced, dick-sucking bitch! And if you touch my arm one more time in that patronizing way I will deck you." Which was soon followed by: "And what the hell do you mean by 'experimenting,' you entitled piece of shit? What happened to '*I'm in this for real, Bennie, I promise. You're my soul mate. My snuggle bunny. I want to make love to you forever*'? Jesus fucking Christ, Ad, I'm not some tab of acid you ate in prep school to gain 'experience' or cool points. I'm not your Dead show phase or a stranger you fuck in an airplane restroom because *it's on your list of things to do*. I'm a person! I have feelings! And up until five minutes ago, I was stupid enough to have given you the benefit of the doubt that you were an actual human being with feelings, too."

"Nothing?" says Gunner.

"Not a word," says Addison.

"So did you accept or ignore?"

"I haven't decided yet. I mean, do I really want to read, 'Bennie Watanabe is drinking coffee' or 'Bennie Watanabe is taking her daughter to school' or 'Bennie Watanabe just cashed in the remainder of her Google stock, and now she has more money than you, Warren Buffett, and God combined, so suck it'?" She honks the horn anew, motioning wildly and fruitlessly to the driver in front of her. "Jesus, go through! Go through! We're going to be late for the—"

"The *luau*?" Gunner laughs. He'd agreed to come this weekend, but only after Addison had pointed out that she'd attended his twentieth reunion the prior year without whimper or complaint. In fact, she'd continued, unable to stop herself, she'd even gone onto the Yale Web site herself, using Gunner's login, and made all the reservations and purchased the tickets for him. "I do *everything* for this family," she'd mumbled under her breath, "so just do this one fucking thing for me," but either Gunner didn't hear this last part, or he decided not to take the bait.

Gunner's stance on all things domestic has remained somewhat militant since Addison broached the idea of having children with him when they were still, according to Gunner, too young to spawn. He wanted the chance to write unencumbered for a decade or so, until they were into their mid-thirties; he wanted the freedom to sleep late and work whenever the muse struck. Addison tried explaining to him that since her art was gynocentric, she needed to experience childbirth and motherhood in order to be fully conversant in her field. More saliently (she showed him a chart of female fertility, with i

gradual downward slope between eighteen and thirty-five, after which the line made a sudden nosedive toward zero), if they were going to have children, she ideally had to fit it in before she turned thirty-five.

“Fine,” Gunner said. “You want kids now, you deal with their mess.” He was the eldest of five. He knew from whence he spoke. Addison was an only child who’d never lacked for the kind of pocket change that drives adolescent girls to babysit.

So while Gunner sat frozen in front of his computer, searching for his muse, Addison produced a series of squalling Griswolds in rapid succession, taking on the full responsibility, as preordained, for their care. She fed them, first from herself, then from a jar, then off a plate. She changed their diapers and taught them, with varying degrees of success and trauma, to use a potty. She handled the grocery shopping and the doctor visits and the straightening of toys and the baths. She did the dishes and the laundry and the bills, she read them their bedtime stories. She dealt with school forms and playdates and Halloween costumes and sneakers and Valentine’s cards and birthday parties and fingernails and snow boots and vomit. Oh the vomit! How had she never realized how much vomit three small humans could produce over the course of their childhood?

In between all this, she squeezed in time to paint, and she continued to answer the question “What do you do?” with “I’m an artist,” even though personal assistant or short-order cook would have been more accurate. Then one day, just after her thirty-fifth birthday, she was stooping to pick up her dog poop, another chore from which Gunner recused himself, when she spotted a flyer advertising the solo show of a girl from her childhood building who’d still been in diapers when Addison was in middle school. It suddenly struck her, like an anvil to the skull, that a whole decade had passed without so much as an exhibition or a sale or even a group show at one of the lesser homespun galleries in her neighborhood. So she pulled Gunner aside and said, “Enough.” He was now officially the age at which he’d originally said he wanted to have kids, so she expected his equal participation as a line worker at the family factory. But by then Gunner had grown so used to the status quo, his domestic muscles had atrophied.

“Outsource it,” he said. “I’m on the brink of something great.”

He was able to suggest this solution, when neither spouse was bringing in money, because both he and Addison were the beneficiaries of small trust funds left to them by their grandparents. Gunner’s parents also paid both for the children’s tuition at St. Ann’s and for their North 3rd Street loft, which was purchased in their name—in cash and in full—back in 1995 when the then-young couple decided to trade up from their one-bedroom in Alphabet City to 3,400 square feet of raw space in the then up-and-coming but still transitional neighborhood in Brooklyn when Addison was pregnant with Trilby. “A great investment,” Gunner’s father had declared, his voice echoing off the walls as he placed his hand firmly on the sturdy column supporting what would become his son and daughter-in-law’s living room, a statement that both time and the Williamsburg real estate market had proven prescient. The \$250,000 loft was now worth, well, who knew with this crazy market? But before the collapse, the apartment below theirs, which was slightly smaller and didn’t have a balcony, sold for \$2.1 million.

So Addison hired more help. The housekeeper started coming in three times a week. A college kid was employed to help with after-school pickups and children’s activities. Groceries were purchased online and delivered straight into their kitchen. A tutor was located to help Trilby with her dyslexia and Houghton with his math. A therapist was hired for the many months it took to help Thatcher work through his night terrors, and a dog walker showed up every day at midday. But still Addison felt frustrated by Gunner’s lack of participation on the home front. “Gunner, please,” she said. “What about if you cook dinner, and I’ll clean the dishes? You were always a much better cook than me anyway. Or maybe you could take the kids to school on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Or to a birthday party now and then. Or I could deal with the pediatrician and you could do the dentist. You get the

better deal there, trust me, because they only have to go to the dentist twice a year.”

But Gunner held his ground. “My parents never took me to the doctor,” he said. “The nanny did.”

“That’s not the point,” said Addison.

“Please, Ad, I’m on the verge of a significant breakthrough in my work.”

“What about my work, huh? What about my breakthroughs?”

“Nothing’s keeping you from making art but you,” said Gunner. A strange sentiment coming from a stalled writer, but also—Addison was loath to admit—partially true. Ever since Thatcher had entered kindergarten, she had five to six hours a day during which she could have chosen to ignore the ambient noise in her head, but for whatever reason, she couldn’t.

And try as she might, both alone and with the Jungian, she could not figure out why. “I’m so angry at my husband!” she’d yell from the couch. Or, “Maybe I’m too stupid to figure out what I want to do with my work. I often wonder if every branch of my family tree hadn’t all gone to Harvard whether they would have even been admitted.” Or, “Most of the artists who succeed have some sort of gimmick. Keith Haring with his cartoon babies. Matthew Barney with his Cremaster Cycle. I need a gimmick. Or a penis. Or whatever.” Or, “Fuck it. Maybe I should just throw in the towel and get a normal job like everyone else.”

This last part she added in for the benefit of her shrink, so he would think his patient was making progress—yeah, right, she thought as she said it, like anyone would ever hire me to do a regular job—but for several weeks afterward she dreamt she was a graphic designer working in a cool glass and steel office in SoHo, wearing horn-rimmed glasses and the leather jacket Bennie had picked out for her at that thrift shop just off Bow Street near Adams House. She would wake up from these dreams with intense longing.

“It’s not the luau I care about, sweetheart.” She pronounces *sweetheart* harshly, like an epithet. “It’s the *people* at the luau. My old friends from college. The ones I haven’t seen in twenty years?”

“Oh, please, Ad,” says Gunner, laughing. “Stop being such a drama queen. You see them all the time.”

“I’m not just talking about Clover and the gang.” Aside from the random dinner in the city with Clover once or twice a year, Addison, Clover, and their other two roommates, Mia and Jane, have been making a retreat, every year for the past ten, to Clover’s weekend house in East Hampton, from which Addison always comes back to the city both refreshed from the multiple massages, mani/pedis, and yoga classes Clover insists on providing gratis but also agitated, in some unnamable way, by being waited upon so overtly. At the Hunt summer house in Deer Isle, Maine, in the compound that’s been in Addison’s family for six generations, most of the help disappeared after her father’s death, and the woman who stayed on made herself scarce whenever the family was around. Gunner’s family’s retreat on Block Island, which his great-grandfather established in 1896, still employs a few caretakers and cooks, whose salaries are paid out of the family trust, but they are the kind of help who come and go undetected, save for the freshly folded towels stacked in the linen closet or the magical disappearance of the grit and sand from the bottom of the bathtub or the freshly baked blueberry muffins left to cool on a wire rack every morning at dawn. The idea of an eager fleet of young Filipinas arriving at 10 each day to file and buff everyone’s nails, to rub oils into their skin, to wax their pubic hairs *so openly, so interactively*, is anathema to the way Addison was taught the help should help.

But Clover, who grew up several inches below the poverty line, could be forgiven for not understanding such nuances and for wanting to make grand shows of largesse. She’d had an image in her head of what extreme wealth looked like, she once told Addison, born of watching TV shows such as *Dallas* and *Dynasty* on the sly as a child—on sleepovers where the parents allowed TVs to be soundless, in front of the appliance store in Novato. And she’d decided she wanted every glittery droplet of it, shoulder pads and all.

“There are at least thirty or forty people I was really close to, yes, including Bennie, if she decided to come,” continues Addison, “most of whom I haven’t seen since we all left Cambridge right after Bush Senior took office. That’s a long time ago, Guns. The Berlin Wall was still up. I’m looking forward to this weekend, so let’s drop the cynicism, okay?”

The driver in front of her hesitates, and she misses the light once more. “*Move the fuck out of the way!*” she screams. “*What is WRONG with you people?*”

“Mom, Jesus, chill,” says Trilby, behind bangs she recently dyed pink. “It’s a friggin’ luau.” She wanted to stay back in Williamsburg to go to a horrorcore rap show on Saturday night, but Addison had insisted she come with the family. “I don’t care if Dismembered Fetus is playing at Pete’s Candy Store, you’re coming with us, and that’s final,” she’d shouted at her daughter, sounding so much like her own mother that time momentarily collapsed on itself—it had been doing that a lot lately—although really, *horrorcore*? At least the Dead shows that accompanied her own years of teenage angst and rebellion were not actually about Death with a capital *D* but rather about Peace and Love and, okay, yes, altered states of consciousness, but the good kind.

As far as she could tell, having done some primitive research online after her daughter became infatuated with the genre—her firstborn daughter! who used to cry and bury her head in her blanket whenever the Wicked Witch appeared on *The Wizard of Oz*!—horrorcore was, at its horrible core, celebration of murder, rape, Satan, mutilation, and cannibalism, replete with loud, atonal music and dash of crystal meth. Hence Addison’s insistence that Trilby apply to St. Paul’s, her and Gunner’s alma mater. At least there, she figures, the type of drugs she’ll ingest will expand her mind instead of rotting her teeth.

“Trilby, please. I don’t need your snarky commentary right now, okay?” She glances into the rearview mirror to catch her daughter’s kohl-outlined eyes, and the two stare at one another with mutual incredulity. In the row of seats behind Trilby’s, she notices that Thatcher has fallen asleep on Houghton’s lap, while Houghton is using his younger brother’s head to prop up Addison’s iPhone. “Houghton, don’t drain the battery too much longer, pumpkin, okay? We might need it.”

“Five more minutes?” he asks.

She and Houghton have always had an uncomplicated, easy rapport, the kind she’d always assumed she’d have with her daughters. But with Trilby playing the goth, and Thatcher’s anxiety and innate shyness requiring medication, of late, to help him sleep, stay in school, and navigate even the most banal social interactions, Addison is left with just one child who even remotely resembled the type of offspring she’d imagined pre-them. “Sure, five more minutes, my sweet. What are you playing?”

“Mayhem,” he says, shooting a Nazi zombie in the heart.

“It’s not one of those shooting games, is it?”

“It’s educational, about World War II,” says her son, not wanting to lie to his mother outright.

That’s when she spots it, just as the light turns yellow: a hole in the traffic. She guns the engine, and the light turns red—cue the siren—and plows through.

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Bucky and I will be celebrating our nineteenth wedding anniversary this spring. We live in Oyster Bay with our four children. I serve on the board of their school.

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